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Controlling Vertebrate Damage: Beavers
Michigan State University
Cooperative Extension Service
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CONTROLLING VERTEBRATE DAMAGE

Extension Bulletin E-871

April 1977

beavers

(*Castor canadensis*)

See also the first in this series: Extension Bulletin E-860 on "General Considerations."

BY GLENN DUDDERAR, Extension Wildlife Specialist

THE BEAVER is an important part of wetland communities. Water backed up by beaver dams provides habitat for fish, waterfowl and other forms of wetland wildlife, and provides a watering place for many other wild animals. Dams reduce the sediment load in the stream. When sediment finally fills in the pond behind the dam, a grassy meadow is formed which provides food for wildlife until the forest eventually closes in the clearing. By holding back water, flooding is lessened and more water percolates into the ground to recharge the water table.

Despite these good features, occasionally a beaver chooses places to live where feeding destroys valuable ornamental trees and shrubs or agricultural crops, or where the pond behind its dam floods crops, valuable tree plantations or sometimes even domestic water supplies, homes and roads. Under the right conditions, a beaver pond may cause a warming of the water, making downstream unsuitable for trout.

REPULSION

(The following technique requires permit from the Law Enforcement Division, Michigan DNR.)

Beavers can often be driven from an area by altering their dam so that they cannot repair it. Once this occurs, the beavers usually find a new location. Occasionally, they will attempt to build a second dam, and this dam must also be altered. The complete destruction of a beaver dam, by dynamiting for example, may not repel them because they usually try to rebuild the dam. To be effective, therefore, you must be more persistent than the beavers.

One way to alter a dam is to break a large hole in it. Then cut poles 4 to 6 in. in diameter, bind them together and place them perpendicular through the dam on the base of the stream bed. It is important to use enough logs to create an opening in the dam large enough to conduct a flow of water equivalent to the flow into the pond. The poles should be long enough to extend 3 or 4 ft. beyond each edge of the dam. As added

insurance, wrap two pieces of sheet metal around the logs at each edge of the dam so that the ends of the sheet metal extend well into the dam and well out on each side. The beaver will repair the opening in the dam, but will not be able to stop the water flow among the poles.

EXCLUSION

If the beavers and their dam are desirable, but you want to protect valuable ornamental trees and shrubs, then wrap the bases of the trees and shrubs with a light-gauge sheet metal which extends high enough up the tree to prevent the beaver from gnawing on the tree. Extend the sheet metal at least 2 ft. above the ground or 2 ft. above the average depth of snowfall.

POPULATION REDUCTION

Live Trapping

Beavers are easy to live-trap on the dam, using a suitcase trap. Unfortunately, suitcase traps are large and expensive.

Make an opening in the top of the dam, large enough to accommodate the set trap, and just deep enough to place the trap just under the level of the water. The beaver will attempt to repair this opening the night after it is made, and will be caught in the suitcase trap. It is important, however, to stake the trap to the dam so the trapped beaver cannot upset the trap in the pond water and drown. The beaver can be carried to an appropriate area and released.

All trapping operations require a permit from the Law Enforcement Division, Michigan DNR.

Steel Trapping

Because beaver pelts have commercial value, a local trapper will often be happy to trap beavers during legal trapping season. Whoever does the trapping needs a trapping license. A permit from the Law Enforcement Division, Michi-

gan DNR, is necessary at other times or if trapping is done within 50 ft. of the beaver lodge or on the dam.

The two steel traps effective for beavers are the No. 3 or 4 leg-holding trap and the No. 330 or 440 body-gripping trap commonly referred to as the conibear trap. The leg-holding trap is most effectively used at the base of slides, along runways between two sources of water, or water and food supply or in any location where the beaver habitually walks.

A leg-holding trap must be set to drown the beaver when it is caught. Otherwise, the animal will most likely escape or suffer unnecessarily. To make a drown set, make an angle iron by boring 2 holes in each end of a 3 in. by 1 in. piece of iron and bending it 90° in the middle. Attach one end of the angle iron to the ring of the trap chain and thread the other end onto a length of wire. Attach a heavy weight such as a cinder block or comparable size rock to the end of the wire to which the angle iron points, and throw it into the deep water. Tie the other end of the wire to a stake driven into the bank and set the trap.

When the beaver is caught, he will pull the trap into deep water and the angle iron will slide down the wire. However, the angle iron will prevent the beaver from pulling the trap back up along the wire, thus preventing him from surfacing.

The conibear 330 has several advantages over the leg-holding trap, although it requires more strength to set. The conibear can be placed in water of any depth, and the beaver is killed when trapped. The conibear can be set at the entrance to a beaver lodge, in an opening made in the dam, along an underwater beaver trail, at the base of a slide just under the water, under the water in a channel made by a beaver or on the bottom of a stream where a beaver normally travels.

Set the conibear trap so that the beaver is forced to pass through the trap as he moves along his travel route. To do this, drive two stakes on either side of

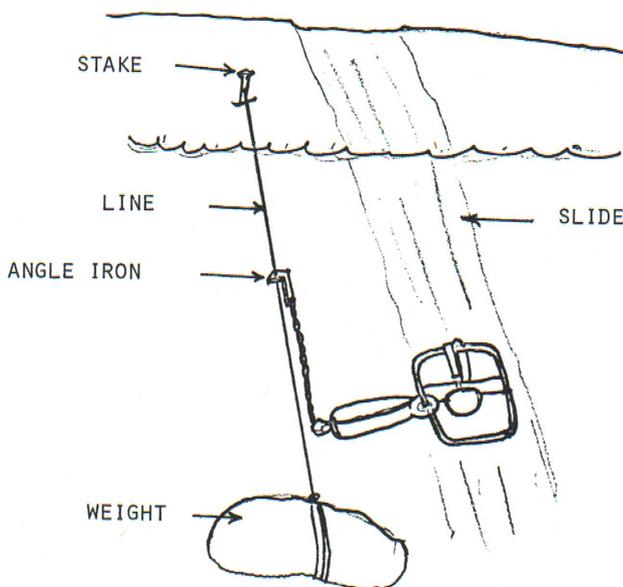
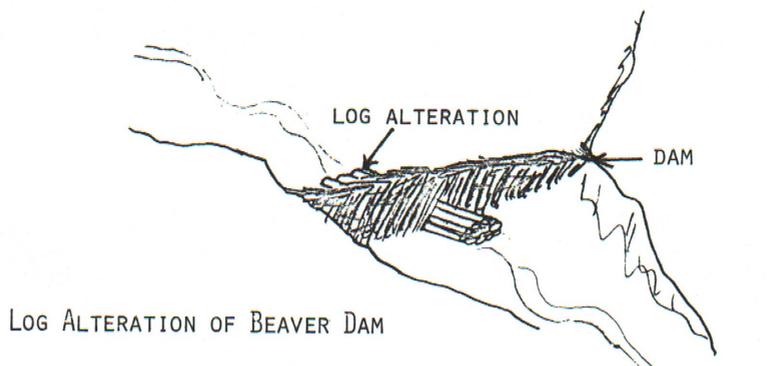
the travel route and slip the coils of the spring down over the stakes so that the trap rests immediately across the travel route. Place other stakes adjacent to the trap stakes to prevent the beaver from swimming around the trap. If necessary, an additional stake can be placed over the top of the trap by supporting it with the trap stakes, thus preventing the

beaver from swimming over the top of the trap.

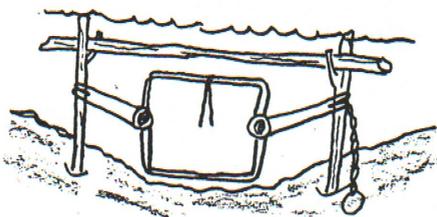
Shooting

Beavers can usually be seen in the early evening or at night swimming about the pond, repairing the dam, building their lodge or cutting trees along the pond edge. Normally, a person

sitting quietly by the edge of the pond just at dark will have ample opportunity to shoot the beavers. Use a 12-gauge shotgun loaded with buckshot. At night a spot light is necessary, but the shooter must be quick because swimming beavers will dive quickly when the light is cast upon them. A permit for this technique is required from the Law Enforcement Division, Michigan DNR.



EXAMPLE OF LEG-HOLD TRAP SET FOR BEAVER



EXAMPLE OF BODY-GRIP TRAP SET FOR BEAVER